

2. Institutional and administrative reorganization: the implementation of territorial cohesion policies in Apulia

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1. Institutional cooperation mechanisms for the implementation of development policies in Apulia⁵

This chapter summarizes the results of a study conducted by the author on the definition and implementation of development policies in Apulia, and aims to provide elements of interest in discussing the institutional and organizational changes that have occurred over the last decade.

Besides reconstructing a map of the main institutional networks operating in Apulia at local level, the analysis highlights the relations between these documented experiences. Taking its lead from wide area strategic planning (see Chapter 1), the analysis sought to verify the capacity of content and of cooperation procedures to take root, through the genesis of further planning activity or the consolidation of territorial coalitions. An attempt was made to demonstrate complementarities, synergies and divergences between past and current experiences, and between institutional networks operating simultaneously in spheres often distinct from one another, topically or territorially. The effect of these was to prompt the adoption of innovative organizational methods and decision-making styles, often foreign to accepted practices, especially in certain areas of Italy (Profeti, 2006; Faraoni, 2004).

⁵ This chapter summarizes and discusses the results of a study by the author on mechanisms for inter-institutional cooperation conducted as part of PRIN 2009 - *Nuove forme di governance per lo sviluppo strategico del territorio. Una ricerca comparata in sette regioni europee* (New forms of governance for strategic territorial development. A comparative study of seven European regions) – Local Unit of University of Salento.

Beyond the current debate on the results obtained in Italy and Europe by the cohesion policy (Bobbio, 2002; Vázquez Barquero, 2010) there is no doubt that this same policy has strongly influenced institutional and organizational changes, helping to redefine the balances between centre and periphery, also to spotlight the role of regional and sub-regional governments and favouring forms of inter-institutional cooperation between levels of government or on the same scale of reference.

Institutional networks operate mainly through forms of cooperation connected with two spheres of public action. The first concerns sectoral planning and the management of services and functions in association; in this case the actors operate on the same scale or in the same sector. The second concerns planning activity in support of territorial development (Meadowcroft, 1999; Bobbio, 2000; Pichierri, 2005; Salone, 2010); this consists in experiences which, in addition to being based on forms of collaboration between organizations operating on the same scale, are placed in contexts of multi-level policy, requiring inter-sectoral approaches and forms of cooperation between public and private entities (Messina, 2005; Donolo, 2005).

In this instance the coalitions are less stable and the procedures, especially in Southern Italy, are applied and managed mainly in the context of European policies for regional and rural development.

Among the mechanisms for implementing the cohesion policy in the regions of Southern Italy, an important part has been played by territorial planning tools which during the 2000-2006 planning period were known as Integrated Territorial Projects (ITP). During the 2007-2013 period, procedures served a different purpose according to the context, with distinct designations attributed according to the regional programme of interest. Apulia has had experience of wide area strategic planning (SP), but also of other territorial planning procedures such as, for example, integrated urban and rural schemes, Environmental and Cultural Systems initiatives or integrated urban and territorial development schemes connected with the procurement of regional development resources (ERDF funding), and similarly, local development plans put in hand by

LAGs connected with the procurement of rural development resources (EAFRD funding).

These are tools that offer a different approach for the implementation of development policies, activating procedures for cooperation between administrations, and between policy sectors and development actors. In certain cases these procedures can generate new planning ideas, helping to redefine the organization of institutional and administrative structures at local and regional level⁶.

As for the outcomes of these experiences — especially in Southern Italy — assessments of their impact naturally differ to a large extent. Procedures have not always given the attention to territories that was hoped for. In certain cases, conversely, they could be seen as creating a rift and an inhibitory effect on the debate surrounding the potential disputes that accompany different policy decisions (Bobbio, 2000; Messina, 2005; Donolo, 2005; Trigilia, 2005; Rossi, 2005; Barca, 2006a, 2006b; Viesti and Prota, 2006; La Spina, 2007; Viesti, 2009).

2. Continuity and discontinuity in forms and methods of inter-institutional cooperation

The process of wide area strategic planning, while representing a distinctive and innovative element in the governance of regional development policies in Apulia, has presented strong elements of

⁶ The current "Delrio" act (n. 56/2014) establishes provisions concerning metropolitan cities, provinces, unions and fusion of municipalities in compliance with the principles of adequacy, subsidiarity and differentiation. The act produces changes in the organization of the territory and in the new articulation of relations between the State and local authorities. In particular, it establishes the reduction of the functions of the provinces, defined territorial entities of wide area, the attribution of administrative functions originally conferred to the provinces, with the law of the State to single municipalities or in associated form and for metropolitan cities, in addition to the functions of Provinces, substituted on the basis of their competence field, new functions are recognized as regards planning, regulation and coordination of wide area (Salvato, 2014).

criticality, in some cases having too many aspects of continuity with the logic approaches adopted previously in decision-making processes.

As discussed elsewhere, the design and implementation possibilities of the actions adopted are often too limited⁷. The power of strategic plans to attract funding has undoubtedly fallen short of expectations, but evaluating to what extent this experience may have generated forms of learning and created functional discontinuities affecting innovation, is no easy matter (De Rubertis et al, 2013; Fighera, Labianca, 2014).

The research conducted has shed light on relationships between the various planning experiences at territorial level over the last ten years. Taking the subject of wide area planning as a unit of analysis, the study set out to verify the ability of content and procedures to become embedded and generate consolidated experiences of inter-institutional cooperation or further territorial planning initiatives. The task attempted — using specific data and other empirical proofs — was to reconstruct the continuities and discontinuities between wide area strategic planning experiences and other local development tools, and to verify the consolidation of these experiences (Vesan, Sparano, 2009).

The research in question revealed elements of continuity/discontinuity between strategic plans and other experiences, previous or contemporaneous, on the basis of the following reference criteria:

- *Strategic continuity* — over time, actions have continued to pursue homogenous development objectives and similar topics of reference; they are built drawing on past experience (mainly ITPs), or alternatively, they follow new trajectories;
- *Territorial continuity* — with the passage from one tool to another, the territorial and institutional sphere of interest has stayed constant, or it has changed;
- *Organizational continuity* — organizations set up to manage certain projects have found space and proved useful in the design and supervision of actions pertinent to other experiences.

⁷ See Fighera in D'Amico and De Rubertis 2014.

Procedures were analyzed adopting a comparative approach and a scale of assessment having three levels (yes/no/weak) and subsequently classified in relation to the logic of the process by which experiences are institutionalized (expansive/reductive)⁸. Continuities and discontinuities were surveyed from the standpoint of strategies, of the territorial situation and of the organizational and institutional system in question.

From the territorial perspective, it is rare that wide area situations will coincide ultimately with past experiences of territorial planning. Likewise with regard to objectives, elements of continuity are rare. And in cases where the strategic intent is more evident, there may even be radical changes from previous experiences. In others, any signs of continuity become of little significance, due to the heterogeneous nature of actions to date. Discontinuity can also be seen on the organizational front. Structures operating at local and regional level have rarely been retained, or involved in new planning schemes.

The picture is different in part when considering the relationship between wide area strategic planning and other territorial development tools such as the development plans of Local Action Groups or the business clusters included in the subject matter of the research. These experiences are similar one to another organizationally, and identifiable as having greater continuity and consistency with past experiences.

LAGs, a product of the Leader Community Approach programme, are seen as being among the first significant examples of contractual policies designed to formalize collaboration between public actors and private entities, with debatably successful results (See Chapter 4). The function of LAGs is to implement rural development policies which, notwithstanding the retention of certain peculiarities deriving from the sector of origin (See Chapter 5), are coming gradually within the sphere of influence generated by the cohesion policy.

In certain contexts, differing in terms of the development model and of political, economic and social dynamics, there has been a move to embrace procedures capable of changing not only policies but also the organization

⁸ See Appendix.

of institutions: this is the case in the area to the north of Bari, in and around Foggia and certain parts of the Salento, where we can discern a progressive institutionalization of different experiences that find confirmation in the proliferation of Unions between municipalities, and in the formation of business clusters.

In this instance, to trace the nature of the relations between experiences, the search needs to focus more on strategic aspects and on the role of actors, rather than on organizational or territorial aspects. Territorial continuity does not appear able to provide a significant variable, except in the case of the two agrifood clusters.

The detection of a certain continuity or discontinuity does not lead to univocal interpretations, especially in a situation such as that of Apulia, where regional government plays a strong and increasingly influential role in driving and coordinating these cooperation procedures. To verify the sustainability of the experiences in question, it must be established whether and to what extent the continuities or discontinuities may be attributable to institutional indolence or to the opportunism of actors in coalition, or conversely to a reappraisal of past experiences, such as to determine a repositioning of territories and institutional networks brought about by a combination of political, social, economic and environmental dynamics.

The history of agrifood clusters, for example, shows that in some cases, not only is the stability of networks far from being an element of innovation, it can even create an obstacle to attempts at introducing reform. In this instance, the inclination at regional level to have only one voice per sector, combining territorial demands and coordinating actors of sub-regional areas around planning topics and ideas, appears to be opposed by solid coalitions of actors at territorial level with appreciable negotiating skills, which impact ultimately to a significant degree on regional policy as well as on institutional organizations.

Aside from the continuities or discontinuities observed, it is worthwhile exploring the logical steps followed by the process of institutionalization in these procedures. In effect, evidence of a certain continuity between experiences does not automatically allow univocal interpretations. To

verify the institutional sustainability of procedures, an observer needs to study the analyses and try to establish if and to what extent any continuities/discontinuities may be attributable to a critical reappraisal of past experiences, to institutional indolence or to the opportunistic approaches of local coalitions, or conversely to a strategic repositioning of territories brought about by a combination of political and social dynamics. Both in ITPs and in SPs, and in the local development plans of LAGs, assessments are left mostly to regional bodies and to technocratic structures operating principally under a logic of permissibility rather than of institutional and organizational learning. Likewise at regional level, notwithstanding certain notable improvements, these procedures still present elements of criticality, with regard in particular to functions and to questions of accountability. Cognitive resources, information on results achieved, on actions and on targets, and on the chain of responsibility, become a strategic element of the guidance and coordination carried on at regional level, but too often these resources remain in a sphere and in a language that is technical and none too accessible.

In the case of Apulia, even with this same “institutional” identity, the various initiatives undertaken appear to retain a certain independence and a distinctive character, not only with regard to the topics and the players involved, or to the definition of the territorial scale of reference, but above all to the elements of continuity and consistency discernible in past experiences and other planning operations in progress on other scales or in other sectors of action (De Rubertis et al, 2014).

In the cases examined, exogenous factors deriving from dependence on European funding, or endogenous factors deriving from the *modus operandi* of actor alliances, appear in certain instances to trigger ritual attitudes that risk delegitimizing policy-determined action entirely.

The findings of the present survey, summarized in overviews attached as back matter, provide a non-uniform and *chiaroscuro* image of the Apulian experience, in which regional government appears to be playing a role of strong and growing influence — not only of orientation — with regard both to experiences of wide area strategic planning and to local development projects promoted by LAGs.

The study brought to light certain elements of continuity over time, such as the relatively stable partnership situation in the passage from ITPs to wide area projects, and the tendency of wide areas to include one or more LAG areas almost in their entirety. Rather than a spontaneous and autonomous search for consistency in the space or the objectives of policies adopted at territorial level, these dynamics seem to derive from a firm action of guidance and coordination taken by regional government.

From every other standpoint, conversely, analysis confirms that the history of wide areas runs parallel and occasionally in conflict with that of other experiences (integrated planning projects, in particular). As regards the strategic aspect, almost all Wide Area Plans are typified by a range of objectives tending to be much more complex than is the case with ITPs. If ITPs were characterized by the consolidation of business chains in the territory and of tertiary services, then wide areas — whilst taking up certain of the actions initiated under ITPs within the scope of their planning — are focused more on questions of mobility and transport, of the environment and energy, and institutional networks. In the majority of cases, the central themes of the ITP are “embedded” in a strategic framework that tends to be all-embracing and not very selective⁹.

In some cases, moreover, wide areas present notably significant discontinuities: the Murgia area opts to “forget” the interests of the furniture manufacturing cluster and the agrifood sector, focusing instead on tourism, hospitality and wellness; the Capitanata 2020 strategic planning initiative concentrates on the theme of mobility, in total discontinuity with the agrifood theme of the Tavoliere ITP.

As to the aspect of organizational continuity, if one excludes the Valle d’Itria ITP and to a certain extent the Salentino-leccese ITP, wide areas are superintended by implementation structures other than the sole Offices designated to oversee ITPs, which are kept in existence for the purpose of “closing” the planning cycle, but play no role whatever in the process of determining the actual wide area plans. These structures are hardly ever

⁹ Whilst the Strategic Plan adopted by Bari is an interesting case, it is actually the result of 20 strategic programmes and more than 800 actions. The effect of such complexities, at least initially, was to delay its implementation.

confirmed as technical project leaders in wide areas — Bari being a partial exception — and are often involved only to a marginal extent in the preparation of candidacies (including Tavoliere, Murgia, Taranto).

An important linking role must be attributed not so much to organizational continuity as to the persistence of a technical expertise — often advisory in nature — as in the case of ITP 5 Valle d'Itria and ITP 9 Salento; it is more rarely that competencies remain “in-house”, as in the case of the Municipality of Bari. The stable presence within the process of certain technical figures would appear also to allow a degree of topical continuity. This is true, for example, in the case of the Monti Dauni strategic plan, the preparation of which is associated with the ITP, both technically and topically, notwithstanding the subsequent heavy criticism voiced by local partners.

Discontinuities or continuities must also be assessed in relation to the existing political and institutional situation. The new wide area planning period created a window of opportunity for new negotiations and realignments, a consequence not least of new political balances created by the regional and local government elections of 2005 (confirmed in 2010 at regional level). In some cases, negotiations were accompanied by an escalation of discontent that led ultimately to the implosion of previous coalitions such as in the Murge or in the territory of Daunia, and the ensuing shift toward areas with more consolidated leaderships, typically the metropolitan area of Bari, where the number of adherents doubled in the course of the passage from ITP to wide area. In other cases, different territorial planning proposals have been reshaped into a single wide area plan, impacting not only on the make-up of the network of actors, but also on the consistency of the plans themselves. From the standpoint of institutional leadership, only a minority of bodies confirm their role of project leader in the passage from integrated territorial to wide area planning.

In reality, the great majority of wide area projects develop independently of ITPs, in terms of organization and management, also of leadership, and indeed of the territorial development strategies around which the planning process is formulated. There are various reasons for

this discontinuity, attributable not least to a different outlook taken by the new Regional Government, which on the one hand has not explicitly favoured processes for capitalization of the skills and networks built up during previous experiences, yet on the other has allowed the activation of different implementation devices, with the end in view of breaking down over-familiar systems.

On the other hand — even at local level — the launch of wide area plans was seen by business and social actors, and political actors too, as an opportunity to rebuild strategic frameworks, in respect of tools — ITPs — which at that time were intended solely to guarantee efficient expenditure profiles. Consequently, there was a shift of attention toward wide areas and Local Action Groups, almost invariably omitting to factor in the possible synergies with experiences still in progress. Moreover, the problem of temporal overlap between the two tools has added further complexity not only in the evaluation of experiences but also in the confirmation of management figures, creating a substantial parallelism, territory-wide, between the two planning cycles, and added to these, the action taken at the same time by LAGs in implementing the rural development plan.

The clearest exception is provided by Monti Dauni where, at least in the initial stages, one has confirmation of the *Comunità Montana* as the management entity, plus the retrieval of topics that had already been the subject matter of the ITP, and a notable consistency with the actions of the rural development plan, indicating that the networks between actors have worked. In other cases, the density and stability of relations do not appear capable of determining an increase in relational capital, and despite a dominant and consolidated leadership, one does not see the same kind of results. It was not so much a “model” that favoured the processes by which experiences are institutionalized, as the presence at territorial level of cognitive and instrumental resources such as would allow the achievement of these outcomes. These resources were of various kinds: the presence of authoritative leaders that have played a part in the decision-making of the partners involved, the role of managers and management structures capable of complementing technical skills with a precise idea of

development in the territory, the aggregation of entities around an idea for the solution of socio-economic or environmental problems, bringing knowledge and innovation or capable of mediating consolidated interests.

Continuities and discontinuities do not always produce the hoped-for effects, but their identification allows a better understanding of how policies and procedures impact together on the institutional system and on the regional development model. Elements of innovation and tradition appear to coexist in the Apulian system, reflecting, not least, a fragmentation and polarization of the political landscape. At regional level there are certain discontinuities: the regional actor appears gradually to take up a fresh position, in the attempt to play a proactive role of regulating and coordinating development (Messina, 2005; Fighera, 2014).

When considering cooperation procedures matured during the experiences of the last ten years at territorial level in the sphere of development and cohesion policies, it is difficult to say how much these may have contributed to improving regional performance through a process of organizational, social and institutional learning (Donolo, 2002), as it is also difficult to establish whether the continuities and discontinuities observed derive from a critical reassessment of previous experiences, or may more simply be the outcome of other logical and dynamic factors. The discontinuities do not however seem so pervasive as to offer a glimpse of progress beyond the traditional tendency in communities of Southern Italy for “strong localisms and weak regionalisms” (Trigilia, 1989).

